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An 'Age of Commerce' in Southeast Asian History

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Since the end of World War II the study of Southeast Asia has changed unrecognizably. The often bitter end of colonialism caused a sharp break with older scholarly traditions, and their tendency to see Southeast Asia as a receptacle for external influences—first Indian, Persian, Islamic or Chinese, later European. The greatest gain over the past forty years has probably been a much increased sensitivity to the cultural distinctiveness of Southeast Asia both as a whole and in its parts. If there has been a loss, on the other hand, it has been the failure of economic history to advance beyond the work of the generation of Furnivall, van Leur, Schrieke and Boeke. Perhaps because economic factors were difficult to disentangle from external factors they were seen by very few Southeast Asianists as the major challenge.

Although political economy has made a recent comeback in the study of contemporary Southeast Asia, the same cannot be said for longer-term shifts. Southeast Asia has scarcely been a part of the fascinating work over recent decades to explore the complex relationships between cultural, political and economic change. The debates about the capitalist transition in Europe and Japan, and about the relative failure of this transition in China and India, have scarcely touched Southeast Asia. This is a loss in terms of our capacity to understand the major turning-points in Southeast Asian history, but also in terms of the global debate about capitalism, to which Southeast Asia should have something to contribute. It was, after all, in quest of Southeast Asian spices that both China (briefly under the Ming Emperor Yong La) and Europe set out on their conquest of the world, and it was to control those spices that the Dutch East India Company (VOC) was formed, one of the most advanced capitalist institutions of its day. Southeast Asia by its geography and its valued products could not escape involvement in the capitalist transition, and in fact did show a shallow-rooted hothouse growth in many quasi-capitalist directions.

To underline this neglect, rather than to assert the primacy of

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economics, I have chosen the term 'the age of commerce' to identify the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. This period has usually been labelled 'early European contact', or 'Islamization', or more frequently still by reference to the great states which dominated parts of it—Ayutthaya, Mataram, the Le Dynasty, or Aceh. All these labels tend to obscure the underlying coherence of a period which brought profound and momentous changes to all of Southeast Asia. These would have to include religious change, urban expansion, state formation and strengthening, and involvement in commerce.

Religious Change

Although Islamic enclaves were formed much earlier, the adoption of Islam by the major states involved in the trading route from Ternate and Tidore in the east to Melaka (Malacca) and Sumatra in the west took place essentially in the period 1400–1620. Islam also spread along other major trade routes—from Melaka northeastward to Brunei and Manila, and to Patani and Champa along one of the routes to China. There were no major Muslim gains after 1620, although the full application of Islamic law by states (what we might today call Islamic fundamentalism) reached its peak in the middle of the seventeenth century under sultans Iskandar Thani in Aceh (1636–41), Ageng in Banten (1651–80), and Hasanuddin in Makassar (1653–69). The latter part of the period also witnessed the conversion to Christianity of most Filipinos, and a proportion of eastern Indonesians and Vietnamese. It appears also to have marked a shift to a more 'rational', universalist, and moralist emphasis in the great urban centres of Theravada Buddhism. There was also religious change in Vietnam in the form of the enforcement of neo-Confucian orthodoxy by the state in the fifteenth century. All these changes in one sense fragmented Southeast Asia into different camps, yet in another they led in a similar direction. The first half of the seventeenth century appears to have marked a high point in a progression towards understanding religion as universal faiths emphasizing morality, rationality, and above all written scriptural and legal orthodoxy. Subsequently there was a return to more rural and local forms of religious expression, such as magic, shamanism and ancestor-cults (Reid 1988: 143–4).

The Growth of Cities

I have argued elsewhere (Reid 1983) that contemporary European estimates of large populations for Southeast Asian cities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries should be taken seriously, especially insofar as they are confirmed by evidence of physical size and the dimensions of food imports. It seems probable that Ayutthaya, Pegu, Hanoi, Demak and Melaka all exceeded 50,000 people in the early sixteenth century, while Ayutthaya, Aceh, Banten, Surabaya and Makassar certainly did so in the first half of the seventeenth. Such dimensions were not remarkable by Asian standards, but they were on a par with most of the leading European cities of the day. In relation to the much smaller total population of Southeast Asia than of Europe, India or China, this made the region relatively highly urbanized. In particular it should be noted that the Southeast Asian trading cities were many times more populous than the colonial enclave cities which usurped their economic, but not their political or cultural, functions. Thus it was several centuries before the port cities which fell to European arms or in some cases to hinterland coalitions—Melaka (1511), Brunei (1579), Pegu (1599), Surabaya (1625) and Makassar (1669)—regained their previous populations.

State Formation

Around these maritime cities there formed states which owed their power largely to the wealth and military expertise which came with trade. Some of them, such as Laos, Aceh, Banten, Banjarmasin, Makassar, Ternate and in a sense the Spanish Philippines, formed themselves into states for the first time only in the 'age of commerce'. Others—Siam, Burma, Mataram (Java), Cambodia—assumed something like their modern shape under strong absolutist rulers. A shift towards centralized rule, the mobilization of huge armies, royal monopoly of trade, codification of law, and the replacement of hereditary chiefs by ministeriales, was particularly evident at the end of this period in the first half of the seventeenth century, under kings such as Bayinnaung (1551–81) and Anaukpetlun (1606–29) in Burma, Songtham to Narai in Siam (1610–88), Agung and Amangkurat I in Java (1613–77), al-Mukammil and Iskandar Muda in Aceh (1589–1636).

Involvement in Commerce

Both internal chronicles and the testimony of visitors made clear that the Southeast Asian courts of the period lived by trade and involved themselves in it. In addition to the ruling circle, there were in each major city a great variety of foreign merchants, some of whom originated outside the region—Chinese, Indian, European, Japanese, Jewish and Armenian—but nevertheless played a role in the life of the cities and often were coopted as court officials. Other commercial communities unquestionably belonged to the region, and of these the Malays (after their diaspora from Melaka in 1511), the Javanese (until around 1620), the Mons of Pegu (until 1599) and the Makassarese and Bugis (after 1600) were the most important. As with commercial minorities everywhere, these groups owed their success partly to their international connections and their mobility, being able to move their operations elsewhere if a particular ruler became too demanding.

This period also marks the apogee of the large Southeast Asian trading ship of 200–500 tonnes, which contemporary sources always call a ‘junk’. Despite its quintessential Chinese ring in modern ears, the word is Javanese in origin and is the normal word for ship in the Malay maritime codes of the period. The mixture of (northern) Chinese and Southeast Asian features found in the wrecks of the period, and described by European observers, has led Manguin (1984, 1985) to dub them a hybrid ‘South China Sea junk’, in which Chinese living either in South China or Southeast Asia, as well as Malays, Javanese, and Mons, may have sailed, but which were usually built with the more abundant Southeast Asian (especially Burmese) woods. By 1650 these large Southeast Asian ships had disappeared, Southeast Asian traders (except for a few rulers) used small vessels of 20–30 tonnes, and the term ‘junk’ dropped out of Malay and Javanese usage, to be used by Europeans only for Chinese vessels, which remained large.

A Boom in Trade?

Do these features give the period an underlying coherence? The term ‘age of commerce’ cannot of course explain all that happened in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, but it does draw attention to one of the dominant features without which none of the other major changes can be understood. To justify such a term, however, and particularly to

identify its boundaries, it is necessary to look at the factors which may have caused the 'boom' of the long sixteenth century, already apparent to European historians, to be particularly acutely felt in Southeast Asia. Fortunately the prominence of Southeast Asian products, notably pepper, cloves, nutmeg and mace, in the markets of Europe and East Asia make this possible.

In 1345 Venice concluded a treaty with the Mamluke rulers of Egypt which for the first time established reliable purchases of spices in Alexandria by the annual galley fleets from the Adriatic. Gradually thereafter the Mamlukes consolidated their control of other caravan routes serving Beirut and Damascus. This progress towards peaceful conditions for the caravans taking Asian goods to the Mediterranean from the Red Sea and Persian Gulf ports coincided with a collapse of the Central Asian overland routes. The latter part of the fourteenth century, therefore, marked a sharp upturn in the trade travelling by sea from and through Southeast Asia to the Mediterranean (Lapidus 1967: 23-4, 121-6).

While this marks the beginning of a sustained upward movement in Southeast Asian pepper and spice shipments to the West, the trade to China was still vastly more important in bulk terms. Marco Polo (1298: 209) had claimed that for every Italian spice galley in Alexandria a hundred docked at the Chinese port of Zaiton (Quanzhou), and China remained the dominant market for Southeast Asia into the sixteenth century. The upswing in demand from China was curiously congruent with that from Europe. At the end of the fourteenth century China began two centuries of expansion in wealth and population. The demand for Southeast Asian products was particularly boosted by the six state trading expeditions of the Ming Emperor Yong La (1403-22). These not only brought home enormous quantities of pepper, spice, sappanwood and other forest products; they also stimulated Southeast Asian production, and left a number of crucial communities of Chinese (often Muslim) traders in the burgeoning entrepôts of the region. T'ien Ju-kang (1981) has shown that the leading products of the Nanyang trade, pepper and sappanwood, became for the first time items of mass consumption in China in the fifteenth century, and so abounded in government warehouses that they were used in part-payment of hundreds of thousands of Chinese officials and soldiers.

The fifteenth century, then, appears to have been one of steady growth in the trade to and through Southeast Asia. Despite the Chinese bans on private trade, shipping across the South China Sea continued to grow. This was possible in the first place because Ming official

enforcement of the ban was very weak between 1457 and the 1520s, so that merchant junks sailed annually in this period from South Fujian to the Nanyang (Wills 1974: 7; Mills 1979: 70). Secondly the system of official tribute voyages was at its peak in the fifteenth century, called forth by the expansive initiatives of the first three Ming Emperors. Siam, the most adept Southeast Asian kingdom at exploiting the system, sent 51 tribute missions to China in the period 1371–1420, in response to the 15 missions the early Ming emperors sent to Ayutthaya. After 1420 Peking lost interest, and sent missions only in the two years 1453 and 1482, whereas Siam continued to exploit the trade opportunities offered by sending missions about once in three years, 27 in total between 1421 and 1503. Subsequently tribute missions declined markedly in frequency as other opportunities for trade opened up (Suebsang 1971: 106–20). Envoys from Melaka, Pasai, Brunei, Champa, Cambodia and Java were similarly numerous in the period 1400–1440, though their numbers declined even more rapidly than the Siamese thereafter (Wang 1981: 74, 102; Fairbank & Teng 1960: 123–9).

A third means of circumventing the Chinese ban was developed by the island kingdom of Ryukyu, following the end of state trading by the Ming in 1433. Merchants of Fujian settled near Okinawa and conducted their trade under the auspices of the Ryukyu crown, which maintained access to China and Japan by regularly sending deferential but highly lucrative tribute missions to both courts. Ryukyu therefore became a crucial link between Southeast and Northeast Asia during the periods when direct trade was most inhibited. In the thirteen years 1430–1442 at least 17 Ryukyu trade missions were sent to Ayutthaya, eight to Palembang, and six to Java. Further bursts of activity are attested by surviving documents from the period 1463–81, when Melaka, Ayutthaya and Pasai (north Sumatra) were the principal trading partners, and 1508–54, when Ayutthaya, Patani, West Java and Melaka (until its 1511 conquest by the Portuguese) were the most frequented ports. The pattern was one of decline in the sixteenth century, however, and Ryukyu ceased to be a factor in Southeast Asian trade by the 1550s (Kobata & Matsuda 1969; Sakamaki 1964).

If a particular moment must be singled out for the beginning of Southeast Asia's 'age of commerce', the first state trading mission under the eunuch admiral Zheng He (Cheng Ho), in 1405, is the best candidate. These missions were probably responsible for the introduction of Indian pepper plants to northern Sumatra, and the enormous growth in Southeast Asian pepper production for the China market

TABLE I
Estimated Exports to Europe of Moluccan Spices¹
(Annual averages in metric tonnes of 1000kg)

Period	Cloves		Nutmeg		Mace	
	reported shipments	est. totals	reported shipments	est. totals	reported shipments	est. totals
1394-97	8	9	1	2	0.2	1
1399-1404	32	33	9	10	1	2
1496-99	52(V)	74 ²	26(V)	37	12(V)	17
1503-05						
to Lisbon	11	13 ³		1	0.24	0.3
to Venice	22	25		5		2
Total		38		6		2.5
1517-33	33(L)	44	11.7(L)	16	4.7	6
1547-48	42(L)	80	24.5(L)	45	10(L)	18
1580-88	132(L)	150	15(L)	45	3(L)	20
1620-21 (DE)		230		200		75
1664-77 (A)			140	140	47	47
1677-1700 (A)	130	130				

(V) shipments to Venice only; (L) shipments to Lisbon only; (A) releases on the market of Amsterdam (after Dutch monopoly); (DE) Dutch and English estimates of European market

¹ For details see tables in appendix. Figures after 1600 are averaged from data in Glamann 1981: 57-8, 101; Steensgaard 1973: 155.

² Accepting the estimate of Wake (1979: 380) that Venice accounted for roughly 70% of total European imports.

³ Accepting the argument of Wake (1979: 377-9) that unrecorded private shipments accounted for about 15% of Portuguese shipments.

which followed. For the spice trade, and for trading cities such as Pegu, Ayutthaya, Melaka, Pasai, Brunei, Grisek and Demak, the fifteenth century was undoubtedly one of expansion.

The sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries continued the trade expansion of the fifteenth, with Europe and Japan increasingly taking over from China the role of external catalysts for growth. The period immediately following the European discovery of the sea route to Asia in 1498, however, was a very bad one in economic terms for the lands below the winds. The 1490s had seen pepper and Moluccan spice shipments in the Mediterranean at a temporary peak, but these dropped drastically after Vasco da Gama's Portuguese reached India in 1498, and began to sink or plunder every spice ship they encountered (see Table 1). To be fair, there were other short-term disruptions, including Venice's conflicts with Turkey in 1499 and with Egypt in 1505-08, and the instability in the Mamluke regime itself prior to the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517 (Lane 1966: 13-14; Magalhães-Godinho 1969: 701-2, 713-28). However it was primarily the losses

suffered at Portuguese hands by the established Muslim shippers and ports in the Indian Ocean which kept shipments of Southeast Asian goods to Europe (and presumably India) at a low ebb for the first three decades of the sixteenth century. The period of Southeast Asian trade expansion, therefore, is not compatible with the 'Vasco da Gama epoch' of Panikkar (1953). Rather was there a pattern of intermittent growth in the fifteenth century (probably strongest around 1400 and in the last quarter), followed by a major disruption in 1500–30, and very rapid growth in the ensuing century.

By the 1520s the Portuguese were regularly shipping to Europe substantial quantities of Southeast Asian pepper and spices, while the Muslim-dominated routes to the Red Sea remained in the doldrums. During this low period the Mediterranean ports themselves had to look to Lisbon for supplies of Asian produce. In addition a Muslim commercial revival began after the initial disruptions caused by the Portuguese. The novel elements of European naval warfare introduced by the Portuguese soon lost their surprise value. The Ottoman conquest of Egypt (1517) and subsequently of the Hejaz and Aden (1538) provided the backing of a great power for Muslim shipping in the Indian Ocean, and under Turkey's banner, if not often its effective aid, Bijapur (in western India), Aceh (Sumatra) and Japara (Java), began to act in greater concert against the Portuguese (Reid 1969). Portuguese factors themselves responded to the requirements of profitable trade by licensing or even financing their erstwhile Muslim rivals. Perhaps most important, the growing of pepper spread rapidly to new areas, particularly along the west coast of Sumatra, which the Portuguese could not control as they did the Malabar coast where most of their naval force was concentrated.

Already in 1536 the Portuguese conceded that 'an immense swarm of prahus' laden with pepper had eluded their patrols and left Calicut for the Red Sea. Portuguese commanders continued to complain at their inability to stop this trade unless greater resources were provided, though in the mid-1540s they did have some temporary success (Magalhães-Godinho 1969: 773–4). Perhaps as a result of this an alternative Islamic route to the Red Sea was established which avoided Portuguese strongholds on the Indian coast by going directly across the Indian Ocean by way of the Maldives from Aceh, which was assuming the role of the principal commercial and military enemy of the Portuguese in Southeast Asia (Boxer 1969: 418). Further east Muslim Javanese and Malay traders defied Portuguese attempts to establish a monopoly of Moluccan spices. Portuguese shipments of Southeast

Asian produce did not decline from the high levels of the 1540s; indeed, if we look at the customs revenue in Portuguese Melaka, which includes private Portuguese trade as well as official trade of the crown, the figures double from about 10 million reals per year in the 1540s to 20 million in the 1580s (Thomaz 1979: 116). However, the Muslim routes had revived by the 1560s to the point where they took as much pepper and spice to the Mediterranean as they ever had, and in general more than the Portuguese.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, therefore, Southeast Asian exports to Europe by these two routes were more than double those which had gone by the old Suez route in the 1490s. In the last three decades of the sixteenth century the output of silver from Spanish mines in Mexico and Peru increased markedly, and much of it was carried to Asia by the Portuguese and by the Spanish 'Manila galleon' from Acapulco. After the foundation of Spanish Manila in 1571, its trade grew extremely rapidly to a peak value of over 600,000 pesos a year in 1616–20, and remained at levels over 500,000 until 1645, when the trade fell away drastically to less than half that amount (Chaunu 1960: 78–82, 245).

The Dutch and English joined the competition for pepper and spices from 1596, leading to high prices and an enormous expansion in production. An average eleven ships per year reached Europe with cargoes from Asia over the period 1600–1630, as against between one and four each which had served the Portuguese and the Muslim–Venetian routes in the late sixteenth century (Steensgaard 1973: 170). In short, it was 1570–1630 which marked the steepest rises in wealth flowing into Southeast Asia from European sources, with the climax of the boom during the first three decades of the seventeenth century (see tables in appendix).

The same period was one of extraordinary commercial expansion in eastern Asia, partly fuelled by the same growth in supplies of silver as occurred in the West. In 1567 the emperor Mu-tsung responded to repeated appeals from Fujian by lifting for the first time the Ming ban on Chinese private trade to the south. Initially fifty junks per year were licensed to trade, though this figure grew to 88 by 1589 and to 117 by 1597. Roughly half the Chinese junks in the 1590s were licensed for the 'eastern seas' (the Philippines, northern Borneo and Maluku), and half for the 'western seas' (the remainder of Southeast Asia)—west Java (8), Cochinchina (8), southern Sumatra (7), Siam (4), Cambodia (3) and Champa (3) being the primary destinations. It seems certain that a large number of vessels also managed to travel without licences,

particularly to the nearer ports in Vietnam (Innes 1980: 52–3). In China this was a period of prosperity, urban expansion, population increase and commercialization, based to some extent on the unaccustomed freedom of international trade and the importation of Japanese and American silver.

Because Chinese bans continued against trading with Japanese ‘pirates’, Southeast Asian ports became the necessary entrepôts where Japanese exchanged their silver for Chinese silk and Southeast Asian sugar, spices and deer hides. The greatest beneficiaries of this exchange were Manila and Hôï-An (Faifo), the strategically placed port developed after 1600 by the Nguyen rulers of the southern Vietnamese kingdom Europeans called Cochin-China. Sixteen Chinese vessels a year were licensed for Manila in the 1590s, and a similar number probably sailed to Hôï An in the following decades (Innes 1980: 53; Chen 1974: 12–16).

The period 1570–1630 was for Japan the ‘great transformation’, which Hayami (1986: 5) has labelled ‘the decisive turning-point heralding the start of Japan’s “modernity”’. Unification, urbanization, the creation of distribution and marketing networks, and the commercialization of attitudes were all a part of this Japanese leap, but it also involved a brief period of intensive trade with Southeast Asia. From about 1580 Japanese ships began frequenting southern harbours, carrying the silver which was being brought out of Japanese mines in unprecedented quantities. During the thirty years (1604–35) for which the Tokugawa bakufu carefully recorded its issuing of licences (*shu-in*) to these ships, 355 Japanese vessels sailed to Southeast Asia, the largest numbers destined for Cochin-China (87), Manila (54) and Siam (55). Then in 1635 this activity stopped abruptly when Iemitsu prohibited any Japanese on pain of death from travelling abroad (Innes 1980: 51–66; Iwao 1976).

Southeast Asia was intimately involved in this global period of commercial expansion. In return for its exports of pepper, spices, aromatic woods, resins, tortoiseshell, pearls, the deerhides which the Japanese imported by the hundreds of thousands each year, and the silk, cotton and sugar exported by Vietnam and Cambodia, Southeast Asia in this period imported large quantities of cloth from India, silver from the Americas and Japan, copper cash, silk, ceramics and other manufactures from China.

The producers of spices and other items of world trade were by no means the major beneficiaries of the boom in demand for their products. Profits of more than 100% were normal at each stage of the

routes by which goods passed around the world. Tomé Pires (1515: 213–14) noted that merchandise bought in Melaka for 500 reis would be sufficient to buy a bahar of cloves in Maluku, which on return to Melaka would sell for between 9 and 12 cruzados—a seven to ten-fold increase. Many would have shared in this profit: the captain and crews of the ships on the different sectors Melaka–Java and Java–Maluku, the capitalists who may have advanced money for the voyages, the rulers and port officials of Melaka, Ternate, one or more Javanese ports and probably also a port in Bali or Sumbawa, the dealers in the foodstuffs and cloth which the vessels would collect in Java, Bali or Sumbawa to furnish the Moluccan trade. A similar process occurred as the spices moved westward or northward, and the cloth moved eastward, growing more valuable at each stage of the voyage. The multiplier effect of the boom in long-distance trade was felt throughout the trading ports of Southeast Asia, and often far into the interior where commercial goods were gathered for export. Not until the VOC (Dutch East India Company) established its remarkably efficient system for monopolizing the purchase of spices in Maluku and shipping them to Europe via Batavia did this extraordinary lifeline of trade pass into a single hand. By the mid-seventeenth century the Dutch were able to sell spices in Europe at about 17 times, and in India at about 14 times, the price for which they had bought them in Maluku, with none of the profit at all passing into Asian hands (Knaap 1987: 253; Masselman 1963: 459).

The broad pattern of growth in Southeast Asian trade seems equally clear whether we look at its western or its eastern branches. There was a sudden take-off around 1400, with intermittent growth through the remainder of the fifteenth century, probably strongest at its end. A sharp downturn occurred in 1500, but was made good by 1530. There was rapid growth again from 1550, accelerating around 1570, and reaching its peak in the period 1600–1635. In Southeast Asia, as in Europe and China, the mid-seventeenth century was a period of crisis, with the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Gujeratis, the Chinese, Japanese and English all suffering a sharp decline in their trade with Southeast Asia. Even the VOC, the unquestioned winner in the competition for control of the spices and the arteries of trade, experienced a period of stagnation in the second half of the century. For Southeast Asia itself, the economic boom gave way by mid-century to a profound crisis which was not only economic but also military, political, and social.

Unfortunately there are no Southeast Asian sources of economic statistics which would make it possible to trace the dimensions of this

trade boom for the region. The centrality of pepper and spices for the trade of Europe in this period, however, does permit some long-term calculations of at least this branch of Southeast Asia's trade. In the sections that follow, an attempt is made to look at four variables crucial to Southeast Asian prosperity over the period from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century. These are the exports from Maluku to Europe of clove and nutmeg; the likely Southeast Asian share of pepper export to Europe; the import to Asia (here Southeast Asia cannot be separated) of silver and gold; and the import to Southeast Asia of its most important item of luxury consumption—Indian cloth.

Clove and Nutmeg

Cloves and occasionally nutmeg and mace (the covering of the nutmeg seed) were mentioned in commercial records of Cairo and Alexandria as early as the tenth century but they remained extremely rare and expensive in Europe until the late fourteenth century. The period 1390–1404 provides the first systematic data deriving from Italian commercial agents for the cargoes of spices being annually shipped from the Mamluke ports of Alexandria and Beirut to Venice, Genoa and Barcelona. These are extremely erratic, as would be expected from the uncertainties of the route by which the spices had travelled halfway round the world. The most astonishing figure is that of the Venetian shipment of 85 tonnes of clove, nutmeg and mace from Beirut in 1399, as recorded in the Datini papers (see appendix). This is as high a figure as in a good year two centuries later, but it contrasts markedly with many small or zero returns in the years before and after. This was a year of exceptionally low prices, so that unusually large amounts must have reached Beirut that year; 1399 was an exceptional peak, probably not reached again for almost a century, but at a period when shipment and even harvesting of the precious spices were still erratic. It may even be that Majapahit, then at the peak of its power in Java, had sent a fleet to the Moluccas which had brought exceptional quantities of spices on to the markets of Java.

When the years for which there are records of cargoes are averaged, it remains clear that spice shipments were at an unusually high level in the 1390s (Ashtor 1979: 757). An annual average of nine tonnes of cloves and two of nutmeg may have been brought to Europe in the years 1394–97, rising sharply to thirty-two and ten tonnes respectively in 1399–1405.

At the end of the fifteenth century figures are again available for the imports of Venice alone, which was at the peak of its domination of the flourishing European spice trade. Venice was annually importing 52 tonnes of cloves, 26 tonnes of nutmeg and 12 tonnes of mace, an overall fivefold increase in imports of Moluccan spices during the century even before considering the possible leakage of spices to other Mediterranean ports.

This flourishing trade was drastically disrupted from 1499 by the Portuguese incursion into the Indian Ocean. Since the Portuguese had no direct influence in Southeast Asia until 1511, however, the losses to Southeast Asian traders from the European branch of trade were probably absorbed in Asia. The Portuguese themselves began to obtain large cargoes of Moluccan spices only in 1513, and for the following three decades they dominated the European market. Magalhães-Godinho (1969: 701–3) has figures for seven of the years 1517–31, which show an average of 33 tonnes of cloves reaching Lisbon each year. In 1580 and 1582 massive Portuguese shipments of two and three hundred tonnes respectively were reported (*ibid.*: 705), but since these had dropped to only about 10 tonnes a few years later (Steensgaard 1973: 155) the Portuguese average in the second half of the century was probably not above 50 tonnes of cloves.

By the middle of the century the Muslim route through the Middle East to Venice had revived, although there are unfortunately no longer reliable direct estimates of quantities. The weakening of Portuguese influence in Maluku after 1550 forced them increasingly to compete with Muslim buyers of cloves in the markets of Asia, rather than trying to enforce a monopoly. After 1575, when the Portuguese lost their principal east Indonesian stronghold in Ternate to a revived Islamic coalition, 'the inhabitants of Maluku refused to give cloves to the Portuguese, and sold them to the Javanese, who in turn sold them at [Portuguese] Melaka' (Brunei expedition 1579: 226). Total clove shipments reaching Europe by both Portuguese and Muslim routes in the second half of the sixteenth century were probably two or three times the recorded Portuguese tonnages alone, and thus about double the previous peak of the 1490s.

In the seventeenth century Dutch reports provide progressively clearer figures for the production, sale, and prices of the Moluccan spices they were attempting to monopolize. The peak shipments to Europe appear to have occurred in the 1620s, when competition for spices was intense between Dutch, English, Portuguese and others, preventing any single seller artificially raising prices on European

markets. European consumption accordingly rose to a peak of over 200 tonnes of cloves, 200 tonnes nutmeg and 70–80 tonnes mace. Since annual production of cloves in the Moluccas did not rise much above 250 tonnes at this point (Knaap 1987: 231), Europe must temporarily have dominated world consumption. The VOC established its monopoly over the nutmeg and mace of Banda in the early 1620s, and immediately sought to reduce supplies reaching Europe to about half those peak levels, with prices correspondingly high (Steensgaard 1973: 155–7; Glamann 1981: 98–101). Not until 1642 could it do the same for the much more widespread Moluccan supplies of clove. The Company then reduced total production to about 180 tonnes throughout the 1650s and 1660s, by destroying all clove trees outside the areas of closest Dutch control in southern Amboina and the Lease islands. The selling price in Europe was doubled to 7.5 guilders per *pond*, and in India tripled to 5 guilders (Knaap 1987: 234–5).

As a result of heavy Dutch pressure on their Ambonese subjects the output grew again from the 1670s to a peak of about 500 tonnes in the 1690s. In Europe they were obliged to reduce prices to 3.75 guilders in 1677, but this desperate measure came too late to prevent a permanent reduction of European clove consumption. A cheaper alternative, Brazilian ‘clove-wood’, had become popular during the period of high prices (Knaap 1987: 245–6; Glamann 1981: 97–101). The last decades of the century therefore faced the VOC with an oversupply of cloves and a reduction in profits from what had been their most lucrative Asian operation. More important, once the monopoly was established the export of Moluccan spices no longer contributed to the wealth of Asian cities and traders, but to the VOC and its enclave entrepôts.

Because of the increasing share of spices taken by Europe, the total curve of Moluccan spice exports would show a less dramatic upward path than this European branch alone. Nevertheless there was unquestionably a rapid growth in the fifteenth century, which for nutmeg and mace was an explosion from almost nothing, followed by a second period of expansion in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

This picture is confirmed by what evidence we have from Maluku itself. Tomé Pires (1515: 219) was informed that up to a decade before he wrote clove trees had been wild and disregarded in the interior of Bacan island, but had then been rapidly cultivated and developed ‘in the same way that wild plums become cultivated plums and wild olives become cultivated olives’. Antonio Pigafetta (1524: 79) heard that until Muslims began coming to Ternate and Tidore, which he estimated to be about 1470, the Moluccans ‘did not care for the cloves’. In reality we

know that Javanese, including some Muslims, must have been sailing to Maluku for cloves since at least the mid-fourteenth century, when Maluku and Ambon were claimed as dependencies of Majapahit and names of some quasi-Islamic kings are recorded in the Ternate chronicles (de Clercq 1890: 148–9). Pigafetta was probably right, however, to the extent that continuous Javanese–Islamic influence to which the Ternatans attributed their coinage, writing, religion, music, laws ‘and all the other good things they have’ (Galvão 1544: 105) appears to have begun only in the second half of the fifteenth century (*ibid.*: 83–5; de Clercq 1890: 148–9; Pires 1515: 213).

Banda appears to have been systematically visited by Muslim Javanese traders even more recently than the clove islands. Ludovico de Varthema (1510: 244), who claims to have visited the islands in 1505 but was probably relying on old, second-hand information, described the Bandanese as primitive pagans ‘like beasts’, who simply collected nutmegs when required from wild trees in the forests. Pires (1515: 206–7) and Barbosa (1518 II: 197) reported that the few thousand people of Banda were a mixture of Muslims along the coast and animists inland. Pires added that conversion to Islam had begun only in the 1480s, and that the cloth brought by the Javanese and Malay traders was still ‘a great novelty to them’, so that they regarded the traders with supernatural reverence.

All of this suggests that the major fifteenth-century expansion evident from the trade figures was concentrated in the second half of the century, and marked a real ‘take-off’ in the export of these valuable crops.

Pepper

Though only a fraction of the price of the Moluccan spices, pepper is crucial because it was exported in ten times the quantity. For the whole of the age of commerce it ranked as the most important single export of Southeast Asia. It was, moreover, a cash crop grown explicitly for the market, which cultivators had to decide to plant and tend carefully for three years before the first harvest, diverting time and capital from other crops. The involvement of thousands of Southeast Asians in cultivating and marketing pepper in response to world demand was one of the most overt economic consequences of the trade boom.

The flow of pepper to Europe, set out in its broadest outline in Table 2, followed a similar pattern to that of spices, though the larger

TABLE 2
Estimated Pepper Exports from Southeast Asia to Europe
(in metric tonnes; figures in italics are my estimates, others derive from averaging
*contemporary data)*¹

Period	Cape route	Levant route	Total	of which from Southeast Asia
1379-89		62	150	0
1391-99		732	800	
1404-05		278(V)	500	0
1497-98		566(V)	800	100
1501-06	586	294	880	100
1517-31	1,174	125	1,300	300
1547-48	1,506	500	2,000	600
1560-64	1,200	1,500	2,700	1,300
1582-90	1,170	1,600	2,800	1,400
1621-22	2,718	300	3,000	1,800
1641-53	2,963(DE)	0	3,300	2,200
1670-78	5,528(DE)	0	6,000	4,000
1680-86	3,191(DE)	0	3,700	2,500

(V=Venice only; DE=Dutch and English shipments only)

¹ Calculated from information in Ashtor 1971: 74-9, 118-22; Ashtor 1979: 756-7; Priuli 1496-98: 59-60, 73, 109; Wake 1979; Wake 1986; Magalhães-Godinho 1969: 701-5, 717; Lane 1966: 14; Steensgaard 1973: 166; Glamann 1981: 80-6.

quantities serve to even out the wilder fluctuations. For pepper also the 1390s witnessed a remarkable early peak in shipments, and probably a short-lived one. This makes it difficult to establish a 'normal' base from which to measure growth during the fifteenth century. Taking an average of all the available figures around 1400, there appears to have been only a slow growth during the fifteenth century. Once the Portuguese had begun to settle into the Asian trading pattern, around the 1520s, the growth became very rapid, with both Portuguese and Muslim shipping routes expanding steadily. By the 1560s there are a number of convincing estimates that between 1,250 and 2,000 tonnes of pepper each year were passing through Egypt on the revived Muslim route (Lane 1966: 30-1; Braudel 1966: 545-51; Boxer 1969: 418-19). Yet Portuguese shipments also continued to expand at least until some disastrous setbacks in the 1590s.

The seventeenth century marked the definitive victory of the sea route around the Cape of Good Hope. A few shiploads of pepper from Aceh were still reaching the Red Sea in 1616, but these dried up

completely over the next decade as even the markets of the Turkish empire had to obtain their pepper from western European shippers (Steensgaard 1973: 171–2). Total quantities shipped to the West continued to increase rapidly, reaching a peak of about 6,000 tonnes a year in the 1670s—twice what it had been forty years earlier.

Because pepper grew so widely in monsoon Asia there was little chance of the VOC gaining a monopoly of the supply. It was not Dutch manipulation of the market which caused an eventual decline in quantities shipped, but a drop in prices caused by oversupply, and a shift to Indian textiles as a more profitable bulk item with which to fill ships for the homeward European voyage. The English pioneered the sale of Indian cloths in Europe, and by the middle of the century these had replaced pepper as the premier item of England's Asian trade (Chaudhuri 1982: 400). Pepper formed less than 10% of English homeward cargoes in the 1680s, and other Southeast Asian produce was scarcely significant (Chaudhuri 1978: 529). For the Dutch company pepper represented 56% of the invoice value of homeward cargoes around 1620, and was still 50% thirty years later. Thereafter it declined rapidly to constitute 31% around 1670 and only 11% at the end of the century. By then Indian textiles represented more than half of Dutch cargoes (Glamann 1981: 14–15).

The greatest expansion in Asian exports of pepper, then, occurred in the century and a half before 1670. The growth in production was especially dramatic in the lands below the winds, which must have provided much the greater part of this increase in exports.

Round or black pepper (*Piper nigrum*), the great article of trade, was native to Kerala, the Malabar coast of south-west India, which was still known as the 'pepper country' to Mediaeval European and Arab travellers. Pepper was not mentioned among the products of Sri Vijaya, nor as growing in Sumatra at the time of the visits of Marco Polo (1292) or Ibn Battuta (1355). Since it was reported in northern Sumatra by Ma Huan, it was probably introduced there from India or Java in the late fourteenth century. Planting may well have been stimulated by the unprecedented demand created by the Zheng He expeditions, which must have been interested in having sources closer than India. Pepper flourished so well in Sumatra (and the nearby Malayan Peninsula) that by 1500 the Portuguese estimated that these new Southeast Asian pepper-fields produced nearly 2,500 tonnes, against 3,600 for Malabar (Pires 1515: 82, 140, 144, 168). Up to about 1530 most of this pepper either remained below the winds or was taken north to supply the vast Chinese market.

During the sixteenth century pepper production spread both in India and Indonesia in response to the growing demand. From Malabar the pepper-vines spread northward into Kannara;¹ from northern Sumatra they spread down the west coast of that island, into its Minangkabau heartland, and across to the Malayan Peninsula. Whereas around 1500 India supplied virtually all of Europe and the Middle East, sixty years later the Portuguese were buying a substantial proportion of their pepper below the winds, while the revived Red Sea route drew most of its supplies from Sumatra. In the seventeenth century the intense competition between Dutch, English, Chinese and Portuguese buyers was centred in Southeast Asia, and India ceased to be a major exporter. The eastern coast of India itself imported pepper from Sumatra (Arasaratnam 1986: 107). Even though the English company was less strongly placed than the Dutch in the Indonesian area, it drew four-fifths of its pepper from the islands in the 1660s and 1670s (Glamann 1981: 84; Chaudhuri 1978: 527–9). One must conclude that the bulk of the increase in the international market was filled by Southeast Asian production, which must therefore have increased at least threefold in the century after 1520.

Meilink-Roelofs (1969: 582) has gathered figures for the amounts of pepper which came onto the market of Banten in seven of the years between 1603 and 1620. These fluctuated widely, but averaged 2,100 tonnes per year. In the 1620s much of central Sumatra's pepper production flowed eastward down the Jambi river, where Europeans judged the market to provide between 300 and 800 tonnes per year around 1618, and between 1,500 and 3,000 a decade later (*SP* 1617–21: 107, 188; van den Broecke 1634 I: 178; *SP* 1626: 154; *SP* 1630–34: 89). Aceh and the west coast of Sumatra which it controlled were thought able to provide about 1,250 tonnes of pepper per year around 1616 (DasGupta 1962: 103–5). Smaller amounts were grown at Kedah and a number of centres on the east coast of the Malayan Peninsula (Patani, Songkhla, Pahang), while Banjarmasin in southern Borneo became a major producer in the 1630s. Van Leur (1955: 124–5) calculated on the basis of ship movements that the whole of the Malacca Straits region must have been exporting about 4,650 tonnes of pepper in 1600. If this calculation were redone for 1630 on the basis of more numerous estimates then available, the total would have to be in the region of

¹ Magalhães-Godinho (1969: 582) cites a 1611 source that total production in south India had risen to 100,000 *bahar* (18,000 tonnes). It seems unlikely that production could really have increased fivefold since Pires' day, since most of this increase would have had to be absorbed by the Indian market itself.

6,500 tonnes—the expansion at Banten, Jambi and Banjarmasin more than outweighing the apparent decline in Aceh. As we know from European import figures, production must have continued to increase until about 1670. Although we cannot know what proportion of the crop was taken to China at different periods, or to consumers in other parts of Southeast Asia, there can be no doubt that the period 1400–1670 was one of remarkable expansion of Southeast Asian pepper production.

Asian Imports of Silver and Gold

Before Europeans discovered the Cape route to Asia and began engaging in the lucrative intra-Asian trade, they had to pay for eastern spices almost entirely in gold and silver. Little of this flowed to Southeast Asia; it was largely exchanged in India for cloth which became the primary article of Southeast Asian import. Nevertheless the level of this flow of precious metal is a useful indicator of the changing levels of the trade.

Mediaeval moralists frequently lamented the 'drain' of precious metal to the east, which reached very high levels at the end of the fifteenth century to meet the first peak in pepper and spice flows to the west. Magalhães-Godinho (1969: 316, 334) calculated that Europe was paying 400,000 cruzados a year, the equivalent of 17 tonnes of silver, for eastern luxuries in the late fifteenth century. This suffered a 'sensational' drop to only 3 tonnes of silver equivalent in the early 1500s, as the smaller amounts of pepper and spice were obtained as much by plunder as purchase. The recovery of the Levantine trade, still largely paid for in gold, and greater Portuguese access to silver supplies, caused a rapid climb in the export of precious metal in the second half of the century. In particular, the enormous increase in output of silver from Spanish America after 1570 proved irresistibly attractive as a means to fund the *carreira de Índia*. The union of the Spanish and Portuguese crowns in 1580 removed another barrier, and in the 1580s there are two independent estimates that the Portuguese were shipping to Goa each year about 42 tonnes of silver (a million cruzados) (*ibid.*: 329–30). In total Magalhães-Godinho (1969: 335) estimates that Europe was sending 72 tonnes of silver equivalent to the east at the end of the sixteenth century, through both Portuguese and Levantine routes.

The seventeenth-century picture is more fragmented, with the

TABLE 3
Supplies of Silver and Gold in Eastern Asia
(Decennial annual averages in metric tonnes of silver equivalent)

Period	Portuguese ¹	VOC ²	English ³	Manila ⁴ galleon	Japanese ⁵ exports
1581-90	8.6	—	—	4.0	30
1591-1600	?	—	—	2.67	40
1601-10	5.9	5.7	1.3	12.0	80
1611-20	4.7	10.9	4.7	19.4	130
1621-30	4.4	12.7	7.7	23.1	150
1631-40		8.7	5.5	18.4	80
1641-50		9.5	?	10.1	50
1651-60		8.6	?	9.0	50
1661-70		11.8	9.9	8.0	30

¹ Calculated from Magalhães-Godinho 1969: 330-1. These figures relate only to official crown shipments to Goa. Total shipments may have been five times as great.

² Calculated from Bruijn, Gaastra & Schöffer 1987: 187, 224.

³ Calculated from Chaudhuri 1965: 115 and Chaudhuri 1978: 512.

⁴ Calculated from Tepaske 1983: 444-5, adding private to public remittances. The figures for 1581-90 and for 1661-70 are estimates, as only the public remittances are known.

⁵ These are rounded estimates based on Iwao 1976; Yamamura & Kamiki 1983; Glammann 1981: 58; Tashiro 1987.

Portuguese, English and Spanish all carrying substantial amounts of specie, primarily American silver, to the east. Official shipments are set out in Table 3. These certainly undervalue the total flow into Asia. The Portuguese figures, in particular, are averages only of the amounts officially sent to Goa for the purchase of pepper, which in the 1580s formed only one-fifth of the total shipments from Lisbon. Nevertheless the figures are useful in indicating with considerable precision the peak of the 'boom' in Asian trade. Spanish remittances of silver from Acapulco to Manila, undoubtedly the largest source of American silver flowing into Asia, reached a peak of 23 tonnes a year in the 1620s, and had declined to less than half that two decades later. The Manila galleon did not for over a century bring such large quantities across the Pacific as it had in 1610-30. The English and Dutch also reached a flatter peak in the 1620s. Both north European countries surpassed these amounts towards the end of the century, but by then a very much smaller percentage of their purchases were in Southeast Asia.

Still more dramatic than the flow of American silver was the sudden expansion of production and export from the Japanese silver mines, following improvements in technology in the mid-sixteenth century. There is uncertainty over the precise dimensions of Japanese exports before 1630, but no doubt that these exports overshadowed the flow of

American silver into Asia, and peaked at exactly the same period. Japanese production was never again on the scale of 1600–30 until the Meiji restoration. In 1668 further silver export was banned, though a trickle did continue through Korea.

Most Japanese silver was absorbed by China, where it helped fuel the commercialization and urban expansion of the late Ming. A large proportion of it went there indirectly through the markets of Hoi-An, Manila, Patani and Ayutthaya, however, and certainly added to the commercial expansion of those and other cities. Portuguese, Dutch and English silver was destined primarily for India, where it purchased the cloth which was essential for doing business in Southeast Asia. Even so, increasing amounts of silver did find their way to all the markets of the east, and Dutch, English and French pepper-buyers in Indonesia were frequently asked to make their payments in Spanish silver reals. These Spanish coins became the effective international currency of Southeast Asia during the first half of the seventeenth century. Although it is not possible to isolate the percentage of the influx of silver which ended up in Southeast Asia, there is no doubt that this influx reached its peak in the 1620s, and that it served in Southeast Asia, as in Europe and China, to expand cities, to stimulate demand for goods and to increase the commercialization of society. The progressive diminution of this influx after 1630 was one of the factors contributing to Southeast Asia's mid-seventeenth century crisis.

Southeast Asian Cloth Imports from India

Cloth was consistently the largest item of non-essential Southeast Asian expenditure, and in good times the major exports of the region paid primarily for imports of brightly-coloured and finely-woven Indian cloth. If the level of such cloth imports could be measured over a substantial period of time, this would provide the best single index of commercial prosperity.

The first useful statistics on the subject are those of Tomé Pires (1515: 269–72). He estimated that at the peak of Melaka's dominance of the Straits of Melaka trade, just before the Portuguese conquest, five vessels a year brought cloth from Gujerat to the city, of which one carried a cargo of 70–80,000 cruzados, and the other 15,000–30,000 cruzados each. Three or four Malabar ships a year each brought twelve to fifteen thousand cruzados worth of cloth, while one or two from Pulicat were valued at 80–90,000 cruzados. Taking the average of these

estimates, we have totals of 165,000 cruzados from Gujerat and 174,750 cruzados from South India. From Bengal Pires (1515: 92) claimed first that once 'and sometimes twice' each year a junk worth 80–90,000 cruzados in cloth arrived in Melaka, and a little later that 'four or five ships and junks' sailed each year for Melaka and Pasai. Presuming these latter to be smaller vessels playing a minor part in the cloth trade, let us assume a total import from Bengal of only 120,000 cruzados of cloth. This gives a total value of Melaka's cloth imports from India of 460,000 cruzados, equivalent to 19.3 tonnes of silver.

Undoubtedly some of Southeast Asia's imports of Indian cloth went directly to Pegu, Tenasserim, Pasai and elsewhere without passing through Melaka, though these must have been partly offset by the Indian cloth re-exported outside the region (notably to China and Ryukyu) from Melaka. Net Southeast Asian imports may therefore have been in the region of 25 tonnes equivalent of silver. Assuming Pires was referring to their value in Melaka, the purchase price in India would have been closer to 15 tonnes of silver.

By the end of the sixteenth century these substantial imports had expanded further. Lancaster seized a single Portuguese ship in 1602 carrying a cargo valued at 300,000 cruzados, mostly in cloth, from Coromandel to Melaka (Lancaster 1603: 107). In the harbour of Aceh, which had taken over part of Melaka's role as the terminus for Indian Muslim shipping, there were sixteen to eighteen Indian vessels in 1602 (Lancaster 1603: 90), half of which were probably from Gujerat, which sent eight large 'junks' there in 1608 (Verhoeff 1611: 242). This Gujerat shipping to Southeast Asia appears therefore to have roughly doubled in the course of the sixteenth century. The Gujeratis could not for long compete with the northern Europeans in buying Southeast Asian pepper and spices for the Mediterranean market, however. By the 1630s they were sending only about three cargoes of cloth a year to Aceh (Mundy 1667 II: 329, 338; Clark 1643: 282), and by the 1690s they had ceased coming at all (DasGupta 1982: 431; Arasaratnam 1986: 126).

The exports of Coromandel to Southeast Asia appear to have grown even more dramatically in the sixteenth century, and continued to grow until their peak in about the 1670s. The Dutch estimated in 1675 that the whole Coromandel coast had exports worth ten to twelve million guilders, equivalent to 100–120 tonnes of silver (Arasaratnam 1986: 96). The majority of this was cloth, and its major destination had been Southeast Asia until Europe began to take over in the 1650s.

It is only for the VOC that we have reliable figures over time for the

export of Indian cloth to Southeast Asia. VOC purchases of cloth in Coromandel grew rapidly from the equivalent of three tonnes silver in 1619 to five in 1621 and seven in 1623 (Coen II: 583; III: 94, 296). In 1645 purchase costs reached ten tonnes of silver, in 1652 22 tonnes, and in 1686 a peak of 38 tonnes (Arasaratnam 1986: 134; Laarhoven 1988).

Around 1620 two-thirds of VOC cloth purchases in India were destined to be sold in Southeast Asia (Coen II: 583); this proportion dropped to a little over one-third in 1652–53 and to about 15% by the end of the century (Laarhoven 1988; also Arasaratnam 1986: 134). Taking into account the smaller amounts of cloth the Dutch purchased in Gujerat and Bengal for the Southeast Asian market, therefore, it appears that the VOC alone was bringing a value of Indian cloth into Southeast Asia equivalent to about five tonnes of silver around 1620, eight tonnes in the 1640s, and 11–12 tonnes in the period 1650–1685, after which the amount fell slowly but steadily.

Even at the height of its dominance in the late seventeenth century, the VOC never took more than one-third of Coromandel textile exports. Before 1640 it took a much smaller fraction of the Indian export trade to Southeast Asia. The Gujeratis brought large quantities to Aceh until 1615, and substantial quantities until the 1640s; the Portuguese and English were bringing over 100,000 rials (2.5 tonnes silver) of cloth to Makassar alone in the 1630s (Coulson & Ivy 1936: 293–4); and even after abandoning eastern Indonesia to the Dutch, the English sent one shipload of cloth from south India to Banten every year in the 1660s and 1670s, with an average value of £10,000, or one tonne of silver (*English Factories* 1668–69: 280; 1670–77: 3, 30, 120–1, 141, 157, 264). And whereas the northern Indian traders dropped out of the Southeast Asian contest in the second half of the seventeenth century, Coromandel shipowners continued to carry most of their region's cloth exports, profiting from the more localized nature of the trade, until the 1680s (Arasaratnam 1986: 119–25).

It is probable, therefore, that the peak period for Southeast Asian imports of Indian cloth was in 1620–1650, at a value of about 60 tonnes silver equivalent per year, roughly four times what it had been in 1510. This would represent almost two million pieces of cloth a year (the VOC alone brought a million pieces to Batavia in 1652, of which 314,000 for the Indonesian market—Laarhoven 1988), for a total Southeast Asian population of barely 25 million. By the 1680s, when the VOC dominated the supply, this may have dropped to only half that level.

The Dutch and British records from the 1630s onwards contain

repeated complaints that the peoples of island Southeast Asia were so impoverished by the loss of their export trade that they could no longer buy Indian cloth as before. After two decades of Dutch blockades and interruptions of its pepper trade, the population of Banten, 'formerly so opulent and prodigal in its daily clothing, now made a very impoverished and desolate [impression]', and had been obliged to weave its own cloth (Philip Lucasz., 1634, cited Meilink-Roelofs 1969: 258). In the 1670s and 1680s, after the VOC conquest of Makassar and the subsequent loss of its spice trade, the Bugis and Makassar people were reported to have resumed their former weaving because they could no longer afford to buy Indian cloth (Coolhaas IV: 139, 246, 336, 715). Similarly the population of Jambi began buying cheaper Javanese cloth in the 1690s, as well as weaving its own, because it could no longer afford the Indian cloth of which the Dutch had monopolized the supply (Coolhaas V: 754; Andaya 1988). The Dutch Governor-General put the problem clearly in 1693:

The weaving of their own cloths has been in practice for the convenience of the ordinary people since olden times among the Javanese and most eastern people; but since these countries flourished more formerly than now, most of these peoples sought Coromandel and Surat cloths not as luxuries [but for everyday use], and gave large amounts of money for that. . . . Now most of the surrounding countries are impoverished and the [Coromandel] Coast and Surat cloths have become limited to the use of the wealthy (Coolhaas V: 639).

A few years later another Dutch official pointed to the impossibility of preventing the Javanese from growing their own cotton and weaving their own cloth rather than buying from the Dutch: 'It is nothing but poverty that is the true reason that the traffic in the finest [Coromandel] Coast and Surat cloth declines daily while by contrast their own weaving has increased more and more through the multiplication of poor people' (cited Rouffaer 1904: 3).

Conclusion

Southeast Asia began a sustained period of export growth around 1400, which was stimulated by Moluccan spices but extended into pepper and numerous other products. The expansion appears to have been quickest at the beginning and end of the fifteenth century, though overall growth in that century was not spectacular. After a serious downturn in 1500–20 provoked chiefly by Portuguese disruptions, the region's trade grew more rapidly in the sixteenth century, culminating in an exceptionally prosperous period in 1570–1630. Thereafter the

region's share in world trade began to drop, VOC monopolies took the most lucrative aspects of the long-distance trade out of Southeast Asian hands, and a period of difficulty began which had become a severe crisis by the 1660s. In the 1680s the 'Age of Commerce' was decisively over, and international trade played a more modest role in the lives of Southeast Asians in the century which followed.

The changes that came over Southeast Asia in the period 1400–1680 must be seen against this economic background. It was a period in which individuals and states could profit greatly from international trade by adapting to its changing demands. Islamization, changes in literary styles and intellectual attitudes or the development of more centralized states cannot be explained simply in terms of commercial expansion, but nor can they be adequately understood without reference to these economic factors.

Appendix

TABLE 4
European Spice Imports 1391–7 (converted to kilograms)

Year	Cloves		Nutmeg		Mace	
	reported	average	reported	average	reported	average
Beirut–Venice						
1394	4,050		270		450	
1395	0	2,190	0	840	0	150
1396	2,520		2,250		0	
1399	60,750		22,500		3420	
1404	17,460	28,260	0	9,450	0	1,140
1405	6,570		5,850		0	
Alexandria–Venice						
1394	1,980		0		0	
1395	0	735	0	0	0	0
1396	225		0		0	
1399	90		0		0	
1404	0	45	0	0	0	0
Beirut–Barcelona						
1391	0		0		0	
1397	10,800	5,400	0	0	0	0
1399	5,760		0		0	
1400	1,260	3,510	0	0	0	0

Sources: Ashtor 1971: 74, 118–22; Heers 1955: 174–5, 185–7¹; Wake 1979: 398.

¹ I am very grateful to Chris Wake for assistance with the Heers data derived from the Datini papers.

TABLE 5
European Spice Imports in 1496-8 (in kilograms)

Year	Cloves		Nutmeg		Mace	
	reports	average	reports	average	reports	average
Beirut–Venice						
1496	27,000		1,530		3,150	
1497	14,580	20,791	14,490 ¹	8,010	7,200 ¹	5,175
1498	not specified					
Alexandria–Venice						
1496	31,372		20,240		0	
1497	35,420	31,035	19,734	17,710	8,602	4,385
1498	26,312		13,156		4,554	
Totals of averages		51,826		25,720		9,560

¹ These figures are obtained by dividing the 482 colli of nutmeg, mace and other spices (Wake 1979: 400n) in the ratio nutmeg 2: mace 1: other spices 3.

Sources: Priuli 1496-8; Wake 1979: 400.

Table 6
Venetian Spice Imports after 1500 (in kilograms)

	From Alexandria			From Beirut		
	cloves	nutmeg	mace	cloves	nutmeg	mace
1503	44,022	0	0			
1504	0	0	0	0	0	0
1505	not itemized			not itemized		
1506	0	0	0	0	0	0
1513	0	0	0			
1514	0	0	0	not itemized		
1515	0	0	0	7,650	0	3,600
1518				2,070	0	0
1522	2,610	540	90			

Sources: Ashtor 1971: 79; Magalhães-Godinho 1969: 615, 717-18.

TABLE 7
Portuguese Spice Imports to Lisbon

Year	Cloves		Nutmeg		Mace	
	reports	average	reports	average	reports	average
1504	22,500		0		125	
1505	7,500–10,000	11,000	0	0	350	237
1506	below 2,500		0			
1513	1,050		16,500		165,000	
1514	0		10,900		265,500	
1517	9,300		0		900	
1519	34,500		6,000		2,000	
1523	60,000		37,500		below 2,500	
1526	30,000	33,217	0	9,800	10,000	3,925
1530	35,650		9,300		4,650	
1531	29,850		6,000		4,000	
1547	61,050		40,950		15,750	
1548	23,500	42,275	8,100	24,525	4,550	10,150
1580	200,000		20,100			
1581			20,650			
1582	310,000	132,275		15,037		
1587	11,000		8,800		3,550	2,475
1588	8,100		10,600		1,400	

Sources: Magalhães-Godinho 1969: 701–4; Steensgaard 1973: 166.

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